

# **The Works and Days of Hesiod**

## **Lines 765-821 – The Days from Zeus – The Happy Man**

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"Let him hear the advice of Hesiod. . . . The advice of Hesiod is good." —Aristotle

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## **The Days from Zeus – The Happy Man**

### **Lines 765-821**

#### **Reading 14**

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This reading comes from the Cave's  
*The Best of Hesiod's Theogony & Works and Days*  
(where it appears as chapter fourteen of the *Works and Days*).

**O**BERVE WELL THE days that come from Zeus.  
Point out what portion comes with each day  
to your slaves. The thirtieth day of the month is best  
for overlooking the work they have done and to deal  
out allotted food.

When the people judge the truth of things, these  
days are the days that come from Zeus, who is wise  
in counsel.

[770] To begin, the first, the fourth, and the sev-  
enth day—the day on which Leto gave birth to  
Apollo with his sword of gold—each is a holy day.

The eighth and the ninth, two days of the waxing

month, stand out as good for the toiling works of  
man.<sup>1</sup> The eleventh and the twelfth days are also ex-  
cellent for shearing sheep and for gathering the  
merry grain—though the twelfth is much better than  
the eleventh. The reason: on that day the high-soar-  
ing spider spins its web during the fullness of day  
and the well-prepared one, the ant, gathers its pile of  
things. A woman should set up her loom on that day  
and get on with her work.

[780] Do not begin to sow on the thirteenth day  
of the waxing month. Avoid it. Yet it is the best day  
to tend plants.

The sixth day of the mid-month is very unfavorable for plants. But it is good for male births, though unfavorable for a girl to be born or to be married. Nor is the first sixth day fitting for a girl's birth. But it is a favorable day for castrating young goats and sheep and for building a sheep pen for your flocks. The same day is favorable for the birth of a boy. But such a boy will be fond of sharp speech, lies, cunning words, and secret discourse.

[790] On the eighth day of the month, castrate a boar and the loud-bellowing bull. But do hard-working mules on the twelfth.

A man who knows what is right is begotten on the great twentieth day of the month in the fullness of the day. Such a man's mind is well guarded.

The tenth day is favorable for a male to be born. But for a girl, the fourth day of the mid-month is favorable.

On that day, the fourth of the mid-month, apply your hand to tame the sheep, and the lumbering, curved-horned oxen, and the dog with jagged teeth, and the hard-working mules.

But on the fourth day of the beginning and the ending of the month, take care to shun the troubles that gnaw at the heart. This day can very well fulfill them.

[800] Lead a wife into the house on the fourth day of the month, but distinguish the birds of omen that are best for this business.

Avoid fifth days. They are difficult, horrible. On the fifth, they say, the Furies (Erinyes) assisted at the birth of Oath (Horkos), whom Strife (Eris) brought into the world to trouble those who have sworn falsely.

On the seventh day of the mid-month, look around very carefully and throw out Demeter's holy grain upon a smooth threshing floor. The woodcutter should cut beams for adding onto the house and many planks for building ships.

You should begin to build narrow ships on the fourth day.

[810] The ninth day of the mid-month improves toward the evening. But the first ninth is completely harmless for human beings. It is a good day both for begetting children and for being born—for a male and a female. It is never a wholly evil day.

Again, few know that the twenty-seventh day of the month is best for opening a wine-jar, and for setting a yoke on the necks of oxen and mules and swift-footed horses, and for hauling a swift ship with many benches into the wine-faced sea. Few men call this day by its true name.

Open a jar on the fourth day, a day that is holy above all other days—[820] the mid-month fourth day.

And again, few men know that the fourth day after the twentieth is best while it is morning. Toward the evening it is not as good.

For men upon the earth, these days are a great advantage.

But the rest fall haphazardly. They are harmless and bring nothing. Everyone praises one day or another, but few know them. Sometimes a day is a step-mother, sometimes a mother.

Divinely favored and happy in wealth is the man who knows all these things and does his work, blameless before the immortals, distinguishing the birds of omen and shunning transgressions.<sup>2</sup>

So ends Reading 14, "The Days from Zeus – The Happy Man." **See you in another Cave reading** in the Cave Library.

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Hesiod seems to divide the month in two ways. One, he does so according to the waxing and waning of the moon. Accordingly, the first half of the month would be 14 to 15 days long, depending on the month. Otherwise, he adds a "middle" portion that would seem to divide the month three ways, into a waxing, middle, and waning portion.

<sup>2</sup> The translation “divinely favored” for *eudaimōn*—which is often given as “happy”—is inspired by Cornelius de Heer’s arguments in *MAKAP– EYΔAIMON–OABIOΣ–EYTYXHΣ: A Study of the Semantic Field Denoting Happiness in Ancient Greek to the End of the 5<sup>th</sup> Century B.C.* Amsterdam: Adolf M. Hakkert, 1969.

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